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CORRIERE DELLA Y.M.C.A.



General ARMANDO DIAZ

THE ITALIAN VICTORY

THE OFFICIAL REPORT OF THE HIGH COMMAND

CONCERNING

THE BATTLE OF VITTORIO VENETO

I ranslated by

OLIN D. WANNAMAKER

Official Organ of the Y. M. C. A. in Italy Bologna, February 15, 1919

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HE representatives of the « Opera di Fratellanza Universale »

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IN THE INTEREST OF TRUTH

— the American V. M. C. A. in Italy — will always preserve the memory of their months of association with the great Italian Army among the cherished recollections of a lifetime. Whatever service the V. M. C. A. has been able to render to the brave soldiers and gallant officers of the army which Italy, in a mood of convinced idealism, cast into the struggle for worldwide justice and which she maintained in the struggle with unflinching heroism, this service of friendship, valuable primarily as a symbol of America's fraternal union with Italy, has been far outweighed by the privilege of being affiliated with men who, through so long a period of exhausting endeavors and heart-breaking sacrifices, counted not their lives dear to themselves if only they might save Italy, and who were ready to pay

The record of the Italian Army is sacred to the Y. M. C. A. It shall be our privilege to render such assistance as may lie in our power to insure that this splendid record shall be rightly presented to our people in America. Not that the Italian Army is greatly concerned to have its story told, but only that the truth is the sole foundation on which right international relationships can be based. It is we who are concerned to have this record preserved, because we believe it is the truth that shall make the world free.

their portion of the price for international justice and lasting peace.

To this end, we publish this translation of the official report of the battle of Vittorio Veneto.

But the truth may be served also by binding together with the story of the great victory, which contributed so directly to the triumph of liberty and democracy, the brief excerpts that follow this introduction. The tribute of General the Earl of Cavan, leader of the British forces in Italy, to the achievement of the Italian Army rings true: it is the honest praise of a soldier, not the compliment of a diplomat. Such expressions of well merited admiration will serve to strengthen the natural ties of friendship between England and Italy. And the equally natural bonds of good will uniting Italy and France will be confirmed by such just bestowal of praise as that which we quote from Marshal Pétain, the French Commander in Chief, to the Italian General Albricci and his soldiers, who had given their loyal aid to France.

The excerpt from an editorial in the Corriere della Sera (Milan) — from which we have taken the liberty of borrowing our title — corrects convincingly a widespread misapprehension in regard to the stage at which British and French reinforcements, sent to Italy after the retreat from Caporetto, in October, 1917, entered the line of defense on the Piave. The gallant contribution of the French and British divisions in the battle of Vittorio Veneto is fully recognized in the official report; and they served gallantly also in June, 1918, when the Italian Army completely frustrated the attempted offensive of the Austrians. It can subtract nothing from the glory of the other great Defenders of Liberty with whom America has had the honor to be associated in the war when we claim for the Italian Army the glory of stopping the Austrians on the Piave. The seemingly exhausted army of Italy proved that it had reserves of fortitude and endurance beyond the utmost possibilities of attack possessed by the confident forces of Austria, at that time materially vastly superior.

In holding the Piave, Italy held the frontier of civilization. Let civilization accord her full recognition for the deed.

In the victory of Vittorio Veneto she struck a mighty blow in the very vitals of military autocracy, and wrought magnificently toward rendering possible such frontiers for the civilization of the future as shall not be transgressed nor invaded, frontiers which shall keep inviolate in future the liberties also of those very nations which, in this war, have been leagued together in a conspiracy to destroy the liberties of mankind. Behind such inviolate

frontiers, watched over by the League of Free Nations, we may surely hope that the progress of humanity will move forward at an accelerated speed.

In the letter of farewell addressed by General the Earl of Cavan to General Diaz, when the English Commander was about to leave Italy in January, 1919, occur these words:

The valorous Italian Army made a marvelous recovery after the disaster, a recovery which will be considered, when its history is told, as quite without parallel, and which has resulted in a victory brilliant and complete .— (Corriere della Sera, Milan, Jan. 23, 1919).

Responding to the congratulations of the authorities of the city of London upon his arrival in England, the English General said, among other things:

- I believe that England has not yet a clear idea of what the Italian Army has accomplished. In 1915, Italy was nominally an ally of our enemies, and yet she entered the war on the side of justice. In 1917, in the terrible days which followed the disaster at Caporetto, I saw, just after my arrival at Venice, the Italian Army in full retreat, and I became convinced that a recovery was impossible before the arrival of sufficient reinforcements from France and England.
- But I was deceived, for shortly afterwards I saw the Italian army, which had seemed to be in the advanced stages of an utter rout, form a solid line on the Piave and hold it with miraculous persistence, permitting the English and French reinforcements to take up the positions assigned them without once coming in contact with the enemy.
- The defense of the Piave at the end of 1917 is an imperishable page in the military annals of Italy; but not less glorious was the victory of June, 1918, when the Italian Army, attacked by the entire army of Austria-Hungary, which possessed a numerical superiority of 11 divisions, not only paralyzed the attack and recaptured the few positions lost during the first day, but reconquered an important tract of territory, and rendered Venice entirely safe ». (Corriere della Sera, Milan, Jan. 23, 1919).
- There is not an army in the world capable of surpassing Italian troops in vigour and dash ».

Marshal Pétain, Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies, addressed the following message to General Albricci, Commander of the 2nd Corps of the Italian Army, on February 16, 1919:

- At the moment when you are about to return to Italy, it is impossible for me to express the satisfaction which I have experienced in having had under my command the 2nd Corps of the Italian Army. When the 2nd Corps arrived in France, in April, 1918, its reputation for valor had already been established by the glorious names of Plava, Monte Cucco, Vodica, Monte Santo, Bainsizza, and Montello. I knew that I could make great demands upon such troops; and they were, in reality, among those who aided on July 15th, 1918, in repelling the furious assaults of the enemy. They were then called upon to capture the famous ridge of Chemin des Dames, and they shared with the French troops in the impetuous pursuit which drove the enemy out of France.
- * In the name of the French Army, I thank you and salute your glorious banners. I salute also the heroic dead who fell on the field of honor. France will hold in equal reverence all those who fell upon her soil for the noblest of causes. Italy has reason to be proud of General Albricci and of the troops under his command who have fought and have won on the soil of France *. (Corriere della Sera, Milan, February 3, 1919).

Must it be, then, that the plain and modest truth of Holding the Piave *. the marvelous resistance on the Piave in November. 1917, is to be obscured by the legend of British and French contingents in the line? For too long a time has this story been repeated abroad, in good faith and in bad... Finally Secretary Daniels, of the American Naval Department, in the very moment of rendering homage to Italy, has officially sanctioned the legend, and has even added to the imaginary French and British troops a still more imaginary American contingent. Speaking at the Metropo-·litan Theatre in New York (January 26, 1919) in praise of the achievement of Italy, he said, in reference to Caporetto: « In the tragic days of the Italian retreat to the Piave, the question passed from mouth to mouth, "Will they stand?" But we doubted only for a moment their victorious resistance. Appealing to their noble traditions, the Italian soldiers, aided by their comrades from France and England, and by a small group of soldiers from the United States, held the line solid ».

The belief in this legend is due to the carelessness and blindness of those who did not wish to place in a true light the events of that period, and yet, amid most painful incidents, there is also much to be narrated that is bright and glorious, much that should be proudly proclaimed. Why should so many heroic episodes — first, during the retreat, and then during the defense on the Piave, at the Grappa, and on the Asiago plateau — have been lost in the gloom of things we preferred not to record? Had the story been told — and it might have been done without any precipitate decisions — of that sanguinary epic of resistance, how greatly it would have redounded to the prestige of Italy!

It might have been demonstrated, first of all — and it was of the greatest importance to demonstrate this, — the page of Caporetto could not tarnish the glory of the marvelous deeds of the Isonzo and the Trentino; that a shining warp united together, across the darkness of the storm, the old glories and the new; that the army of the victory, however much better trained and tempered, and, as it were, refined by long sacrifice and disaster, was, none the less, still the same army of the first impetuous holocaust. And, beyond the possibility of equivocation or misunderstanding, the contribution of England

^{*} An editorial entitled In Behalf of Truth, in the Corriere della Sera (Milan) Fe bruary 1919.

and France for our succor during the retreat could have been placed in its proper light.

Certainly, it was a great comfort to all who experienced those tremendous days, in which an abyss seemed to have opened to engulf forever all the hopes of Italy — certainly, it was a great comfort to see the splendid motorcar of Foch, with its waving tri-color, on the roads of the Veneto, encumbered as they where with the reflux of the retreat. Even greater would have been the comfort could we have known that Foch had come to complete arrangements for assistance already offered, and already taking form in the movements of divisions.

On October 26, in fact, our High Command received the sincere and generous offer of Painlevè, so moving in its simplicity: that, if there was need of French troops, they were ready. And the next day came the offer, no less sincere, of British troops. Sir William Robertson announced that two divisions were preparing to transfer from France to Italy; that, should other troops be needed, the Italian Command was to call for them. The arrangements were quickly concluded: four French divisions prepared to transfer to Italy.

The zone first chosen for the French troops was the quadrilateral Bassano-Thiene-Vicenza-Cittadella, with the divisions facing the line Bassano-Thiene; a later choice, however, was the region of Montebelluna-Castelfranco-Spresiano-Treviso. The British troops were to be assembled around Brescia.

But the orders were changed in the early part of November, and the reasons for the change are clear. While the governments at Paris and London favored the immediate use of their troops on the Piave front, selected by the Italian Government and Command in the full consciousness of the extremely serious consequences that would follow should their line be again broken, General Foch reasoned on technical grounds to a different conclusion. He maintained that the line on the Piave could not be held, and insisted upon a new general retirement to the line Mincio-Po, which was less extensive than the Piave line, because of the inundated great Veronese Valleys, and which also possessed an advantage in its vise-like form. Since he considered the line of the Piave untenable, he was unwilling to assume the responsibility of sending his troops there to be exposed to the risk of involvement in a possible disaster.

These were humane considerations, but they could not prevail with us.

We felt that the moment was upon us for a superhuman effort to save Venice, Treviso, Padua, Vicenza, Verona.

After a conference at Rapallo, it was decided, not only that the French troops should not cross the Mincio, but that they should undertake primarily the defense of the sector Stelvio-Garda. The English at first detrained at Pavia, and then moved their quarters to Mantua; the first steps had been taken toward the formation of the line desired by Foch. And yet, only a short time ago, a Paris journal — as if there were not enough merit already for Marshal Foch in the victory of the Somme and of the Marne — attributed to him also ad abundantium the idea of resisting the enemy on the Piave, which was, on the contrary, conceived entirely by General Cadorna. Not only so, but General Cadorna had succeeded in putting his plans into operation before he was relieved from the command, having already effected with the cooperation of the Commands of the armies, the falling back of the First and Fourth Armies to the line of the plateau and the Grappa, and having placed all other available troops on the Piave.

The peril for us was augmenting daily: the enemy was exerting a powerful pressure on the Piave and had begun his formidable blows on the Grappa and the Asiago plateau, in the effort to repeat the encircling manœuver to the north which had been successful on the Isonzo and the Tagliamento. Our army was exhausted, deficient in numbers, in artillery, in machine-guns, in entrenchments. Worn out divisions were shattered on the plateau and the Grappa; the mere beginnings of trenches, without parapets, and the capricious river were the sole defense of the veterans on the Carso and the young recruits of the class of '99 on the Piave. Who will ever be able to do justice to the grandeur of that heroic sacrifice, to the anguish of those days in which one lived from hour to hour, animated by the energy of sorrow, an energy rather of exasperation and desperation than of hope or faith?

And the Allies did not arrive! Should we suffice alone, with our weakened forces, with our inadequate equipment, for the terrible responsibility of barring the way to an enemy already victorious, who saw the triumph within reach of his hand? The miracle was achieved: our forces, multiplied by a love of country which had become a consuming flame, sufficed for the task.

By the middle of November, the enemy was firmly held on the Piave from the sea to Monfenera, and by the 19th of November an equilibrium had been securely established in the sector Monfenera-Monte Tomba. On the plateau (Meletto and Sisemol) the battle continued through the second half of November and reached its culmination from the 4th to the 7th of December. But the blows of the enemy failed to penetrate the lines of our troops, whose defense had grown steadily firmer.

The perilous arc from the plateau to the sea was cemented with the very blood and flesh, with the very life-essence of our race alone. The arc was solid when the troops of our Allies moved gradually, one portion after another, toward the east, and the French took up their positions south of Bassano as a general reserve and the English between Padova and Cittadella.

The first to enter the line were the English, who relieved our Ist Army Corps, between the 2nd and 4th of December, in the zone of the Montello, where the pressure of the enemy had now entirely ceased.

On December 5th, the French entered the line, relieving the 18th Italian Division in the sector Osteria del Monfenera-Rivasecca, which was now entirely normal.

The 332nd American Infantry Regiment arrived in Italy at the end of July, 1918.

These are facts. Perhaps the statement of them will not be sufficient now to discredit a false legend, but these faithful notes may serve to give a somewhat more general understanding of the truth, which, until the present time, has not been permitted to shine forth even among ourselves.

It will shine forth so much the more if some day - without any desire to detract from the value of the aid rendered to us by our Allies in November, 1917, which was of very great moral value - the story shall be told of the sending of 70,000 of our soldiers in the early months of 1918 to the west front as laborers in order to render available an equal number of Frenchmen for the lines; and if to this there shall be added the fact that in the spring the entire 2nd Army Corps was sent into France and was immediately put into the line and resisted heroically, in the hills of Rheims, the German offensive.

THE BATTLE OF VITTORIO VENETO

(Translated from the report of the High Command of the Italian Army)

OUR PLANS AND THE AUSTRIAN OFFENSIVE

The strategic conception. The conviction that the world conflict could be most speedily brought to an end by putting the Austrian Army out of the war, — which would isolate Germany militarily, and force her to surrender, — had always constituted the central conception of the High Command and had inspired our operations from the end of the preceding winter, even while, in the process of reconstructing the army at the cost of efforts seemingly superhuman, it might have appeared that the more important problem, if not the only one, was that of insuring the integrity, constantly threatened, of the new front between the Astico and the sea.

While, therefore, we sought to render our front invulnerable by the multiplication and strengthening of the means of defense, thus bringing about an array of forces which would suffice to confront any attack that could be foreseen, at the same time our thought, our study, and our activity were devoted to the moral and material preparation of a powerful offensive organism, a gigantic spring ready to hurl itself forward whenever the hour should strike.

In this preparation — brought about by the most diligent technical organization together with the most solicitous care for the well-being of the soldier — in body and in spirit — the prime essential was to be the achievement of a moral ascendency over the adversary in such a manner as to dominate him and to impose upon him the consciousness of our superiority. This ascendency was obtained by means of partial actions, raids, carried out without

cessation along the entire front, with the result of constantly elevating the spirit of our troops and depressing that of the enemy.

At the same time the High Command was considering how conditions might be created favorable for developing, as soon as the situation should render it possible, the desired fundamental and decisive action. Its strategic conception — to bring the war to an end by defeating Austria, — was based upon the principle of concentrating efforts against the weaker enemy. But if Austria might be considered relatively the weaker of the two principal adversaries of the Allies, yet, at the beginning of the spring of 1918 its army was still in full numerical efficiency, was supported by positions exceedingly strong both by nature and by art, and, most of all, was still unimpaired — as it remained to the very end - in its mcral composition, in armament, and in resources. To attack the enemy in a thorough-going fashion in order to put him out of the war was, therefore, still not possible unless with the assistance of forces to be brought from elsewhere and of Allied artillery, which might assure us the material superiority, necessary for the two reasons, that we might drive the action to a finish and that we should not find ourselves, when the action should be completed, with exhausted forces in unprepared positions, exposed to a powerful counter attack, such as Austria might attempt with German reinforcements, — a supposition quite probable in view of the German forces available upon the west front and of the rapidity with which troops could be transferred from one part of the chessboard to another, a rapidity practically twice as great as that attainable by the Allies.

Plans limited to a minor offensive.

But the exigencies existing upon a field more vast rendered it impossible to count upon Allied reinforcements from elsewhere; on the contrary, at the beginning of March, by reason of events on the west front, the Allied forces in Italy had undergone a sensible diminution. Therefore, our proposed offensive had necessarily to be limited to an action of minor range, for which the forces present in Italy might suffice and the results of which, calculated according to the least optimistic suppositions. might prove to be, nevertheless, an actual step toward the grand offensive, to be prepared and matured in secret, with all the forces of the mind and the spirit, in expectation of the supreme hour.

The Asiago plateau was chosen as the sector for the action, with the three-

fold intent of gaining space in one of the directions most vital for the enemy; of freeing ourselves from the menace which there faced us because of the insufficient depth of our mountain positions in that sector; and of securing a new front stronger and better suited to be a base for a fresh effort, and more restricted, so as to permit us to economize our forces and accumulate the reserve necessary for the final operations. To be specific, the results of this action were to be as follows: To gain possession of the margins of the Valsugana and thus to control the road between Trent and Feltre, the principal artery of communication between the Austrian mass of the Alps and that of the plain; to render possible an economy of several divisions in the lines; to give depth to the protection of the left flank of our troops holding the lines between Brenta and the sea; and to insure full liberty of movement and of manœuver in either direction whenever in later efforts we might wish either to turn in the direction of Trent or to operate across the Piave.

The Austrian offensive. The offensive, prepared in agreement with the Allies, was ready to be launched toward the end of May. But it could not be undertaken, for trustworthy information had been reaching us since the middle of May to the effect that the Austrians were planning to carry out a tremendous, desperate attempt against us. Reliable information also indicated the sector of the attack, - between the Astico and the sea. The High Command found itself faced by a dilemma: to attack and seek to forestall the enemy, or to await his attack and be prepared to repel it.

The former solution was the more attractive; but, upon careful consideration, it appeared to be the less opportune and expedient. The enemy was superior in numbers; new divisions had arrived so that the number of his divisions was about 60, soon thereafter increased to 65, against 56 of our divisions and of those of the Allies. Moreover, he was ready, with all of his energies tense, for an effort intended to be decisive. Our attack, even though it were certain of success, would require us to weaken vital sections of the front, leaving these exposed to a hostile offensive; and a victory on the plateau would not save us, in view of the superiority of the forces of the adversary, from a breach in our lines in directions that would have been perilous!

Neither was it possible to expect reinforcements from the Allies, already subjected to a supreme test in the actions during March and now again put

to the proof at the end of May. So much the less could aid be expected, since at the beginning of June the imminent attack of the Austrians appeared, according to information entirely credible, to be associated strategically with a new and tremendous attempt which the Germans intended to repeat upon the west front in order to break the barrier that our valorous Allies had succeeded in opposing to their two preceding desperate offensives, to break this barrier before the American forces should be efficient, and with the moral aid of our defeat, which they considered to be certain.

It was necessary, then, to await the attack. Our action was postponed and parts of our forces and our artillery which were to have been used in the offensive were so disposed as to reinforce the weakest of our sectors. In the space of eight days our offensive arrangements were transformed into a potent organism for defense and for a counter-offensive, with strong reserves for manœuver. But the strategy of our defense consisted in the tactics of violent, swift, obstinate, incessant attacks: attacks which prevented the preparatory artillery action of the enemy by means of a tremendous counter-preparation designed to destroy the nerves of the adversary before he could develop his effort, and continued thereafter without intermission: it was one shock against another. The troops which had longest been prepared for an offensive defended themselves by attacking. The Austrian offensive began on June 15th; wherever it broke through, as on Montello and the lower Piave, the enemy was immediately, on the same day, caught in a storm of repeated counter-attacks, taken by the throat, compelled to recede, to recross the Piave in disorder. The effect of our tremendous reaction was such that the Austrian official reports declared their attack was met by the Italian offensive in course of development. The enemy who had considered himself certain to invade the Venetian plain, who had everything ready to make a prey of the beautiful cities and to reach the Po at Milan, retreated in defeat, broken, without the hope of recovery.

Thus there began on the Piave a turn in the tide of the world war.

Plans for an offensive resumed. At the beginning of July the condition of the enemy, repulsed and demoralized, was such that the war would probably have been terminated if we could have passed immediately from our victorious defensive to an offensive. The High Command considered this possibility. But the effort put forth,

though it had sufficed to inflict upon the enemy losses estimated at more than 200,000 men, had also imposed upon us a notable diminution of strength. The High Command had made the wisest and most economic use practicable of the reserves, so as to have at its disposal at the end of the battle six divisions that had not been engaged; but, of these, the Czecho-Slovak troops were not yet completely organized, and two Italian divisions had arrived from other sectors, and had not been in repose since coming from the front line. Moreover, the means upon which we could calculate, very limited at best, which had availed through almost miraculous prudence and foresight to supply our defensive and suffice for the difficult and delicate contest in reserves which had given us the victory, had now suffered a great diminution and were insufficient for new operations on an extensive scale. No aid of any kind whatever could be expected from the Allies, who had gigantic forces themselves to face. Therefore, it was impossible to exploit, by means of an immediate offensive, the success of our defensive battle; the program of action, though always aggressive, was limited to local operations for the purpose of re-capturing, as was actually done, the few pieces of captured terrain that remained in the hands of the enemy in the mountain zone. In addition, we succeeded in a brilliant advance, over territory tenaciously defended and bristling with snares, in liberating again the zone between Sile and the new Piave.

In order to carry out a plan of operations on a far more extended scale, designed to prepare the way for the conclusion of the war, it was necessary, then, to bring about a new preparation of men and means, and this was undertaken without delay. The rebuilding of weakened units had already commenced even while the enemy was still withdrawing across the Piave. In order to reorganize and increase the means at our disposal, to renew our supply of munitions, to augment to the utmost the means for an offensive, an appeal was made to the energies of the army and the nation, both of which responded wonderfully, in a noble emulation of endeavors toward the attainment of our supreme purpose. In the 'meanwhile, there followed upon our victory of the Piave, the brilliant French counter-offensive of the middle of July; on the Marne, as already on the Piave, there began a new phase in the war, and the last German hopes of victory on the western front disappeared.

A critical responsibility. The situation which arose out of these events was full of promise, but also filled with uncertainty, especially for the Italian front. The evolution that had occurred in the fortunes of war gave us hope that the conclusion was approaching; but, in order to arrive at this conclusion there were required stable and fundamental preparation, the right blow at the right moment, the avoidance of any false move, which, at that crisis when the equilibrium of forces seemed to have been reached, and when that balance of forces was about to be overcome by us, might have compromised for an indefinite time the final result.

Complex and extremely delicate, therefore, was the task that we must accomplish.

Beaten on the Piave and on the Marne, robbed of the hope of a speedy victory on the western front — so necessary to him — the enemy might now put forth an ultimate effort, concentrating his entire available forces against the army of the Allies numerically weakest, — that is, against our army. The possibility of a rapid concentration of German forces on our front by means of railway lines capable of transferring troops twice as rapidly as was possible to the Allies from the western to the Italian front; the serious and even decisive results that might follow such a move, — these considerations rendered the hypothesis logical, probable, and perilous. But to add to the force of this hypothesis, there came to us information rendering it evident that the enemy was actually laying his plans to this end.

The High Command, then, even in the act of preparing for an offensive, had to avoid losing sight of the defensive that might become a necessity.

The program of the offensive, considered in itself, should have been planned with a view to putting into the combined efforts of the Allies the most effective coordination obtainable, according to one of the two practicable solutions: either the weightiest possible attack, with all forces, throwing into the balance the last possible man, in case the Allies should perceive along their front the possibility of actually overcoming the equilibrium of forces and of reaching the decision in a single blow; or else a preliminary attack, as the first phase of a more elaborate effort to be put forth in case the enemy, though beaten, should succeed in reestablishing a solid defensive front over the entire field of the conflict.

The crisis in drafts. Now, this situation, promising and at the same time grave, found us at a crisis in drafts. The battle of June had cost us about 90,000 men; and in this loss the greater part of our reserves had been absorbed. The class of 1900 was in course of instruction; but the High Command was firmly determined to spare that class at least until the spring of 1919, and to send them into the battle only in the event that the war should have to be prolonged for another year, a possibility which, at that time, could not be excluded from consideration.

There was left to us in reality a slightly greater number of reserves than was absolutely necessary to supply normal losses in units mobilized during the second half of 1918. This is not surprising when one bears in mind the enormous efforts already put forth; the units gradually reconstituted during the months when the army was being reorganized after October, 1917; the extent of our contingents in Albania (about 100,000 men), in Macedonia (35,000), of our 2nd Corps in France (48,000), and of that Allied army of about 70,000 militarized Italian laborers still in France engaged behind the lines — not to mention yet other contingents in the colonies, in Russia, and even in Palestine.

This was a consideration such as to cause the gravest preoccupation to the High Command, at a moment destined, perhaps, to decide the outcome of the war, a moment when it was essential to have available the greatest number of men and greatest abundance of means in order to be able to act without delay in the manner and to the degree that the situation might render necessary from moment to moment.

In order to increase the complement of reserves, the greatest possible numbers of men fit for fighting but up to that time engaged in other branches of service, in the army or elsewhere, were now made available and plans were made to complete as quickly as possible their training for the lines. Those selected came forward willingly, and the army and the nation emulated each other in abnegation and the spirit of sacrifice, in order to meet the exigencies of the time with a smaller number of men — exigencies which, in the face of an approaching decisive action, do not decrease but are multiplied, both in the production of war materials and in immediate preparation:

Alternate plans for a minor or a major offensive. While undertaking these organic preparations, the High Command renewed at the beginning of July the prepara-

tions for an attack on the Asiago plateau. The plan of the offensive, — thanks to the increase of available means, especially of artillery, obtained in the meanwhile through national production, — was coordinated with a subsidiary plan of attack to be developed in the region of Pasubio, with a view to the capture of Col Santo and in order to threaten the plateau of Folgaria, which defends the lines of communication of the Valsugana. This subordinate operation, to be carried out first, was planned to reduce the difficulty of the principal attack, that on the Asiago plateau.

But simultaneously with this plan of operations, of a limited range, determined upon in agreement with the Allies, another and a vaster design was being silently matured within the Command, a plan entrusted to the study of a few men and guarded with the most rigorous secrecy.

This was the design kept in readiness to be carried out in the event that a decisive alteration in the general situation should render it possible and logical in every way to risk an effort to end the war by a single decisive blow, releasing all our forces in a supreme effort in a direction vital to the enemy, — an effort to be made, perhaps, at the cost of the heaviest losses, but which should break through the enemy's lines and roll them back in a decisive breach. In that case the preparation which would have been completed upon the Asiago plateau and in the region of Pasubio would have served all the more effectually by its display of force to hold the attention of the enemy and retain the mass of his troops in a sector different from that chosen for our attack, while our troops, artillery, and subsidiary services could be concentrated with maximum celerity in a new sector of attack, thus introducing a factor essential to success, — that of surprise.

In the meanwhile men and commands were being trained and prepared with feverish rapidity, in order to be ready to pass at the chosen moment from trench warfare to the warfare of movement. While, in the midst of the greatest difficulties, preparations were being happily realized for the most complicated redispositions considered necessary, at the same time, in order that no unforeseen exigency might find us unprepared, the units were trained diligently in long marches, in crossing streams, in the various duties of the artillery, and for all the requirements of warfare of manœuver. This preparation was greatly facilitated by the elasticity developed in the organism of the army during the months devoted to its re-organization, by the indivisibility of a division, always strictly observed, and by the possibility of periodical

exchanges of divisions in the line, rendered possible by the principle of formation adopted.

During the entire month of August the general military situation, although continually improving, did not appear to promise an early decisive alteration, such as was indispensable before Italy should be able finally to risk all in order to obtain all. Consequently the preparations continued without interruption for the attack upon the Asiago plateau and at Pasubio.

Even for this operation, which, although The solidity of the enemy. relatively limited in scope, required one half of the entire army, it was necessary to insure every probability of success by the most scrupulous preparation and by the choice of the right moment for action. The attack was to be made against an enemy still superior in strength, very solid in his organization, and holding positions fortified to the utmost degree. After our victory on the Piave, which the lack of forces and of means did not permit us to exploit, the Austrian army, under the direction and with the assistance of its German allies, had recovered from its demoralization and completely overcome its disorganization. The prompt reorganization of the commands, the careful rearrangement of the forces, obtained by means of substitutions and the recasting of the lighter units, and through a rigorous weeding out of the less solid elements, these steps and the most solicitous care for the well-being of the combatant troops, accomplished by imposing the severest sacrifices upon the population of the interior, had restored order and strength to the army of the enemy. If the struggle among the different nationalities under the monarchy produced its disintegrating effects, yet the moral and material organization of the adversary remained intact, or almost so, and he showed himself still tenacious, as, indeed, he continued to be during the battle of Vittorio Veneto — Hungarians, Croats, Slovenes, these were elements among which the strife of nationalities would have been expected to produce the greatest effects. This confirmed our conviction that no important result could be expected from these disintegrating movements until after a decisive military defeat should have been inflicted upon the enemy. The impression and estimate of the unchanged spirit of combat in the troops of the adversary was obtained by means of minor partial actions, developed here and there along the front by our troops and those of the Allies, and especially in an attack undertaken by us in the

region of Tonale, August 13, an attack which encountered the most obstinate resistance and was met by a skillful and perfected organization of the artillery fire of the enemy.

In this condition of things, considering our numerical inferiority and deficiency in drafts and the impossibility of providing reserves from our own forces alone, the choice of the moment for the attack upon the plateau became a task of the greatest delicacy. It was necessary to observe the situation with vigilant eyes and to act without hesitation at the first sign of a propitious change. The High Command was unwilling ever to be led into a fruitless sacrifice of men, yet it was ready to risk everything when once the situation should render this risk expedient and necessary. The preparations for the proposed action were pressed forward so as to be complete by the middle of September.

The Austrian lines; weakened.

But new events were occurring. In the middle of September there began on the Balkan front the victorious attack of the Allied Army of the East, comprising our 35th division, and from the very first days of this attack evidences began to assure us that it would succeed. Quite unexpectedly, the Bulgarian

ing our 35th division, and from the very first days of this attack evidences began to assure us that it would succeed. Quite unexpectedly, the Bulgarian front was yielding, breaking, little by little, under the pressure of the Allied troops. Although superior in number of men engaged and favored by positions of the greatest strength, which had appeared for a long time to be practically impregnable, the Bulgarian troops gave ground. A wide breach was opening thus in the flank of the Austro-Hungarian Empire; and in order to close this breach, even if only temporarily, the enemy was obliged to withdraw forces from our front and sacrifice the overwhelming superiority in numbers which he had preserved up to that time. This might, perhaps, create the situation hoped for, awaited during so long a time, and make it possible to launch all our forces in an attack in the direction most perilous but also decisive, in order that we might at last bring the war to an end.

Such a situation as this could obviously not come to maturity in a single day. It was necessary to follow every movement of the enemy with eyes even more intent, to feel his pulse from hour to hour, to be able to pass to the execution of our more extensive plan of action at the precise moment desired. All the details of the plan of operation secretly matured had been in the meanwhile rapidly decided: on September 25th, four days before the conclusion

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of the Bulgarian armistice, orders were given for a rapid concentration of our forces, of the artillery and technical services, along the sector chosen for the attack, no longer upon the plateau, but along the middle stretch of the Piave. Vittorio Veneto was to mark the first stage of the advance into which we should cast all our forces and all our determination, in order to merit and to seize the victory!

The strategic conception.

The fundamental idea of the action conceived by the High Command was to separate by a decisive breach the Austrian mass in the Trentino from that on the Piave, and then by means of an enveloping action to bring about the fall of the entire mountain front, which would involve necessarily also the complete retirement of the enemy front on the plain.

In order to carry out this conception, consideration was given to the fact that, of the two Austrian armies (the Sixth and the Fifth) holding the line between the Grappa and the sea, the army farther north (the Sixth) had its line of communication extended in its last stretch along the left flank of that army, which created a strategic situation exceedingly dangerous. The front of this army reached from the basin of Alano to the right of the Piave as far as Ponte della Priula; its tine of communication was Vittorio-Conegliano-Sacile. To reach Vittorio would mean, therefore, for us the severing of this vital artery: this would cut off all food and munitions, and place the Sixth Austrian Army completely at our mercy. In order to render possible an advance toward Vittorio, it was decided that we should break the front of the enemy at the point tactically weakest — that is at the junction between the two Austrian armies on the Piave.

Once Vittorio should be reached, the High Command proposed to concentrate its maximum effort toward the heights, with a twofold purpose: 1. To move on Feltre in an enveloping action behind Mt. Grappa in order to capture this imposing bulwark, by a combined action, a manœuver coordinated with a frontal attack of the troops on the mountain; 2. To reach the Belluno valley junction in order to advance from that point by way of the Cadore and the Agordino, while the troops advancing toward Feltre and those descending from Grappa should have moved forward through the Val Cismon and the Valsugana — a movement which would create a threat of irreparable disaster for the entire Austrian array in the Trentino.

The success of this extensive manœuver depended essentially upon surprise and rapidity of action. To achieve the necessary decisive rapidity in breaking the enemy lines, the High Command knew that it could count, not only upon the accurate training carried out during a long period and the perfect preparation, but also and most of all, upon the conviction pervading the minds of commanders and troops alike that the determined crash through the enemy front would give us a complete victory. As for the elements of surprise, this was assured us by the very character of the manœuver that we intended to develop, which differed in conception, in form, and in method from any manœuver previously executed during the war. Even admitting that the enemy, in view of the many indications that could scarcely escape his notice, might perceive the imminence of an attack, yet the direction and the objectives of our chief effort could not be discovered by him — a fact which would render it impossible for him to prepare adequately and in time and would constrain him, therefore, when we should have carried out victoriously our first thrust and should have broken through his front, to submit entirely to our initiative.

This expectation was completely justified by the event; so much so that the reserves of the enemy on the plain were kept to the very last opposite the lower Piave, — that is, far away from the principal direction of our immediate attack, — which was a complete confirmation for the High Command of the excellence of the manœuver planned.

Difficulties to be overcome. On the other hand, although cherishing absolute confidence in complete and final success of the proposed attack, the High Command had not overlooked the provisions rendered necessary by the consideration that the crossing of a river subject to floods during the rainy season is liable to conditions that cannot be foreseen and which the most accurate observations and cautious watchfulness could not possibly exclude, while the presence of the river is in itself an element which may, through favor of circumstances even of the least importance, completely change, in an utterly unforeseen manner, the strength of the resistance of the defense. All this was provided for, by multiplying, on the one hand, the points at which the river should be crossed, and by regulating the action in such a manner as to require only a gradual passage of the troops across the stream: while the construction of telefericas across the

river, provided for in every detail beforehand, and the preponderant mass of artillery operating upon the right bank of the river, would probably insure, even in the worst of circumstances, such as were not likely to arise, the certain holding of great bridgeheads upon the left bank, rendering altogether unlikely the necessity of recrossing the river in confusion as the Austrians did in June. Moreover, the troops were to receive rations for three days; and rations and small arms ammunition for five days were accumulated in proximity to the river crossing's and the telefericas, to be transported across the stream immediately after the troops. In order to give elasticity to the action and insure for all of the fundamental movements of the manœuver unity of direction and of impulse, the decision was also reached to articulate more perfectly the array of armies between the Brenta and the sea, — the Fourth, Eighth, and Third Armies, — by introducing two new armies, the Twelfth and the Tenth. The Twelfth Army, brought into line between the Fourth and the Eighth, between Mt. Tomba and Pederobba, would be assigned the task of advancing toward Feltre behind Mt. Grappa — operating on both sides of the Piave — after storming the defenses of the Alano basin and the heighths of Valdobbiadene. The Tenth Army, between the Eighth and the Third, should pass the Piave at a Point opposite the Grave di Papadopoli and advance toward the Livenza, thus creating a defensive flank to cover and protect the principal manœuver of the Eighth Army in the direction of Vittorio, and drawing toward itself the reserves of the enemy assembled in the lower parts of the plain. Since the successful formation of these two armies did not require elaborate arrangements — because of the purely tactical function to be assigned them — therefore, in view of the secrecy necessary, their formation was deferred to the latest possible moment. Previous instructions were given to the officer assigned to the command of the Tenth Army on October 11th and to the officer assigned to the command of the Twelfth Army on October Ilth; and the two armies were actually constituted on October 14th.

The command of the Tenth Army was entrusted to General the Earl of Cavan, commanding the British forces in Italy; that of the Twelfth Army to General Graziani, commanding the French forces on our front.

Artillery and material for bridges. Orders for the concentration of the forces and of the means required for the action were issued on the 25th, and their execution began on the

20th. In the space of fifteen days, between September 20th and October 10th, about 800 pieces of medium and heavy artillery, 800 guns of smaller calibre, and 500 trench-mortars were transferred to the new front, — a small part of these from the general reserve, but the greater portion from a distance and from high positions in the mountains, -- locations were selected for this artillery, and it was installed and the registration of its fire was completed. Together with the artillery, there were concentrated 2,400,000 rounds of ammunition; and this entire task was accomplished during continuous torrential rains, and while the health conditions of the troops were such as to augment greatly the difficulties encountered. During the same period 21 divisions were concentrated, moving on foot for the most part and at night to their new front from the rear or from other sectors. On the plateau, in order that the adversary might not have any indication of our movement which might prove of the greatest value to him - such dispositions were made that, while artillery forces were being withdrawn, the array of units in the first line, in contact with the enemy, remained constantly unchanged and active. All these movements had to be completed, according to the orders, by October 10th; and, though so complex, confined to the night, and hindered by the weather, the movements were actually completed exactly at the appointed time, - an achievement due to the watchful forethought of, all the commands and the commissariats.

Since the preparation had been completed promptly and in a satisfactory manner, the action might have been initiated, as was desired, on the 16th; but the rains again hindered this, and the flooding of the Piave enforced a delay. On the 18th the atmospheric conditions were even worse, and it became evident that the delay would necessarily be prolonged for at least a week, at the very time when the military situation, clearly evident in the first half of October, gave strong indication that our undertaking, if well conducted, would inevitably lead to a decision in the war.

It was undoubtedly necessary and also expedient to risk all for all. Every other sector must now be stripped to the maximum for the sector selected for the attack. By a supreme effort 400 additional pieces of artillery might be rendered available. Since the artillery along the Piave front seemed sufficient to force a decisive breach in the enemy's line, the High Command decided to strengthen with these new means of action the troops in line between the Brenta and the Piave, according to a plan which the Command of the Fourth

Army had had under consideration since August, and in accordance with which positions had already been prepared even at that early date for the artillery reinforcements required. In accordance with this plan, the Fourth Army, intended previously only to cooperate in the principal action, which would be developed by the Eighth and Twelfth Armies, received orders also to take a fundamental share in the operations, in such a way as to precede the principal action and prepare for it, by drawing toward its own front the enemy's reserves located in the Arten-Feltre gorge, and by endeavoring to reach that region as its final objective, which would greatly facilitate the attainment of the objectives we had selected.

The 400 pieces rendered available were transported with the utmost rapidity, between October 19th and 23rd, to the Grappa front, from distant sectors, even as far away as the Giudicarie. They arrived and were placed in position, and their ranges were registered; and at the same time the necessary munitions were concentrated. By the evening of the 23rd all preparations were complete for the attack also along the Grappa front.

To comprehend the extent of the effort put forth, another aspect of our preparation must be noted. The plan of attack contemplated, in its first phase, the passage of the Piave, an important stream of water, impetuous and swift, subject during the autumn to floods which would prohibit the construction of any sort of bridge. The choice of the moment for effecting the passage, could not, therefore, be left to chance. This choice was, in fact, based upon an accurate study of the behavior of the stream during a long series of years, and upon direct observations, minute and prolonged, of the courses and the changes of the branches of the river, the velocity of the current, and the points least difficult of passage. In order to effect a crossing of the stream, a huge quantity of necessary materials was provided and assembled beforehand — a huge quantity, because the force of the current and the facility with which the enemy could destroy by means of artillery fire and aerial bombs any bridges thrown across the stream required that there should be at hand a great reserve of materials for the inevitable and frequent replacements. A part of this material had been worked up some time before. New companies of bridgemen had been organized, and some of these were provided with mechanical, in place of animal, transport, to insure greater rapidity of movement. When the preparations were complete, there were ready for us — thanks to the work of both military and private factories — more than 20 equipments for regulation bridges, fully 5,000 yards of tubular foot-bridging of a special type for boats specially constructed, besides regulation material — barges and trestles — for 5,000 additional yards of bridges. In addition there had been constructed or requisitioned in the lagoons, rivers, and canals of upper Italy hundreds of boats, large and small; and thousands of anchors had been provided, since we estimated that the violence of the current would require the use of two for every boat, both in the bridge for wheeled traffic and the foot-bridge.

Nor was this all. During the days of preparation, everything was organized that would be needed for the prompt repairing of the permanent bridges over the Piave and other water courses in the territories to be liberated, by concentrating in the region of Treviso and Mestre more than 70,000 cubic feet of timber for bridges which was promptly worked up and prepared on the spot, including the iron parts and accessories. Everything in this prodigious undertaking which we were about to carry out had to be provided beforehand in the most minute detail; everything must be ready and was ready, in order that we might exploit the victory in its entirety, even to the grandest and most remote of its consequences.

The opposing forces. The enemy held the front from Stelvio to the sea with $63^{1/2}$, divisions, of which, at the beginning of the battle $39^{1/2}$, were in the front line, $13^{1/2}$, in the second and $10^{1/2}$, in reserve.

In the sector chosen by us for the attack, from the Brenta to Ponte di Piave, there were 23 enemy divisions — 18 in the first line, 5 in the second; and 8 divisions in the first line and 3 in the second from the Brenta to Pederobba; 7 in the first line and 2 in the second from Pederobba to Ponti della Priula; 3 in the first line from Ponti della Priula to Ponte di Piave. In the areas back of the enemy's lines there were available 10 divisions, brought close to the front in anticipation of our attack — of which, of course, some indications had at last come to the notice of the enemy — and capable of being moved easily from one sector to another, by means of the Trento-Feltre-Belluno road. In all, the Austro-Hungarian Command was able to oppose directly and immediately to our offensive a mass of 33 ½ divisions without weakening any sector of the front, maintaining in the sectors not under attack a total of 30 ½ divisions.

Picked divisions, prevailingly constituted of German or Magyar elements, held the vital places in the line, the pivotal points in the front of attack; these were the 40th Honved Division (Col Caprile), the 42nd Honved (Prassolan), the 13th Schuetzen, and the 17th Division (Solerolo), the 50th Division (Spinoncia), the 20th Honved and the 31st Division (Quero gorge), the 41st and 51st Honved (Susegana heights), the 29th and the 7th Division (region of the Grave), the 64th and the 70th Honved (to the north of Ponte di Piave).

The defensive system of the enemy was formidable: in successive lines in the region of Grappa, favored, moreover, by dominating positions; in battle belts, according to the system called « the elastic defense », along the Piave. These battle belts, formed of centers of resistance placed according to the accidental character of the terrain and in such a manner as to support one another, were grouped in two successive positions: the first, about two kilometres in depth from the left bank of the Piave, covered by advanced trenches on the Grave di Papadopoli, had been named Kaiserstellung (the position of the Emperor); the second, situated about 3 kilometres to the rear, was called Koenigstellung (the position of the king).

Machine guns, small trench cannon, trench mortars in the greatest quantity, together with the usual offensive infantry weapons, the rifle and the grenade, constituted the armament and immediate defense of the enemy works. Potent masses of artillery — in all more than 2,000 pieces – ready to execute a registered barrage or counter bombardment, were grouped densely at the flanks of the individual sectors of the defense and behind them, so as to develop actions of maximum efficacy either to the front or in an enfilading fire.

Three distinct masses of artillery defended the region to the north of the Grappa, in all 1,200 pieces. The first mass, placed along the eastern margin of the Asiago plateau to the west of the Brenta, comprised more than 400 pieces; the second, distributed on both sides of the Val di Seren, comprised about 600 pieces; the third, to the east of the Piave in the zone Segusino-Valdobbiadene, numbered about 200 pieces. To these three masses of artillery we opposed altogether about 1,800 pieces, of which about 500 were located along the eastern margin of the Asiago plateau, about 800 in the zone of the Grappa, and 500 in the region Monfenera-Pedarobba.

Before our Pederobba-Palazzon sector, there were grouped in 3 distinct masses about 500 pieces; the first mass on the hills between Valdobbiadene and Colbertaldo, the second in the plain of Sernaglia, the third in the zone

Collalto-Susegana-S. Lucia del Piave-Mandre. To this artillery we opposed a mass of about 450 pieces in the zone of Cornuda, and 1,700 pieces in the zone Montello-Palazzon, facing the chief front chosen for the breach.

Finally, about 350 pieces could be employed by the enemy along the front of Grave di Papadopoli, where the Italian pieces numbered about 800.

Summarizing, on our side more than 4,750 pieces of artillery of all calibres, including about 600 heavy trench-mortars, could concentrate their destructive fire along the front of attack; and close to the front there had been accumulated for this action 5,700,000 shells, a supply of munitions for eight days.

The entire front was held by us with 51 divisions of Italian infantry, 3 of British, 2 of French, 1 of Czecho-Slovak, and the 332nd Regiment of American infantry.

The mass for the thrust. The mass destined to break the enemy front in the initial phase of the battle, and to exploit its success, was composed of 22 divisions of infantry of the first line, of which 2 were British and 1 French. These divisions composed the following armies: the Fourth under Lieut. General Giardino; the Twelfth under General Graziani of the French Army; the Eighth, under Lieut. General Caviglia; the Tenth under General the Earl of Cavan, of the British Army. Italian divisions to the number of 19, – 15 of infantry and 4 of cavalry, and he Czecho-Slovak divisions were held in the second line as a reserve, or a potent mass for manœuver, and 6 divisions of these constituting the Ninth Army under Lieut. General Merrone, and the Cavalry Corps under H. R. H. the Count of Turin, were held subject to direct orders of the High Command.

Conscious of the gravity and the magnitude of the effort which it was about to demand of the army, the High Command, after having waited resolutely for the propitious moment, determined at length to hurl all its troops into the struggle, in which it foresaw decisive results for Italy and for the common cause of the Allies. And the operation long meditated, matured, desired, was destined to develop — as indeed it did develop — exactly according to the plan chosen beforehand, to strike the enemy unexpectedly in a most vital direction and produce the irremediable collapse of his entire front.

THE BATTLE

The attack at the Grappa. The battle was to begin at dawn, October 24th, with the attack of the Fourth Army in the region of the Grappa, to be carried out with the cooperation of the left wing of the Twelfth Army and with a supporting artillery action of the Sixth Army on the Asiago plateau. The Sixth Army had also received orders to execute, as a diversion, important local attacks along its entire front; while the Tenth Army was to take possession of the Grave di Papadopoli, thus crossing in the preliminary action the principal branch of the river.

Between the Brenta and the Piave our artillery fire began at five o'clock of the 24th; at 7:15 the infantry moved forward to the attack. A dense mist, soon developing into a pouring rain, hindered the efficacy of the opposing artilleries but did not impede the close fighting of the infantry and the machineguns, wich assumed very soon a character of the greatest fierceness. The Asolone, occupied by direct charge, had to be abandoned under a tempest of fire from machine guns in mountain caves and under the pressure of violent counter-attacks. The Pesaro brigade (239th, 240th Regiments) took Mt. Pertica by storm and the 23rd Assault Detachment and other elements captured Point 1484 on the Prassolan; but, subjected to a decimating fire of the enemy, these troops were also forced to withdraw behind the positions, where they kept up a tenacious resistance from shell holes. The Lombardy Brigade (73rd, 74th Regiments) caught between their columns of attack the summit of Soloralo and occupied Point 1671. The Aosta Brigade (5th, 6th Regiments) took the Valderoa from the enemy in a bitter struggle, capturing the survivors of the garrison. The attack upon the Spinoncia was in vain, disclosing machine guns in every rock and almost vertical walls of rock to be scaled. Farther to the east, the Second Battalion of the 96th Infantry Regiment (the Udine Brigade), after 'a succession of gallant charges, got possession of the col di Vaial and began the ascent of the summit of the Zoc.

The left wing of the Twelfth Army, supporting the action of the Fourth, descended from. Mt. Tomba and from Monfenera into the Alano basin and succeeded in establishing itself on the north side of the Ornic mountain torrent.

In these bloody actions our men captured 1300 prisoners and numerous machine guns.

During the same time, assault patrols of the First Army in the Val d'Astico and on the southern slope of the Val d'Assa and special attacking columns of the Sixth Army on the Asiago plateau broke into the advanced positions of the Redentore (Val d'Astico) and the Cima Tre Pezzi (Val d'Assa) and entered the trenches of Canove, of the Sisemol, of Stenfle, and of the Cornone, with the purpose of alarming the adversary and holding him in those sectors, preventing him from removing forces into the Grappa region. After violent clashes they brought back prisoners. The Sisemol, cleared by a French column which captured the entire garrison, was held throughout the day for the purpose of accentuating this action of demonstration. The fierce resistance met in the region of the Grappa did not cause the High Command to change its plan: it gave orders to persist in the attack, in order to break down the resistance of the enemy and absorb his reserves.

Meanwhile, the forcing of the middle Piave, appointed for the night of the 25th, had once more to be deferred for some days on account of the adverse atmospheric conditions once more supervening. The waters of the river swollen during the preceding days, had been slowly falling, so that in the early hours of the 24th, troops of the Twelfth Army, British and Italian, had been able, in accordance with orders, to occupy in the region of Grave di Papadopoli the islands of Cosenza, Lido, Grave, and Caserta. But a little later in the same day an exceedingly heavy storm of rain suddenly began in the mountain zone and on the plain, and the river rose afresh to such an extent that in the zone set for throwing bridges across between Pederobba and Sant' Andrea di Barbarana, even at the places of the least depth along the fords, the level of the water had risen to a heighth of 5 feet 2 inches, and the velocity of the current exceeded in most places three yards a second. Yet preceding observations led us to believe that this phase of rise in the river would be of brief duration, and the decision was reached to postpone the passage of the river until the evening of the 26th.

In the meanwhile, the preparatory action continued with maximum vigor. On October 25th, while the Tenth Army was consolidating its possession of the Grave, the Fourth Army reorganized its troops, and, after renewed preparation by artillery, pressed its action vigorously everywhere, concentrating its efforts upon the points most stubbornly defended by the enemy, — Col

della Berretta, Asolone, Pertica, Solarolo, — and endeavoring to extend its conquest of the Valderoa.

The 9th Assault Detachment charged from the Asolone and succeeded in reaching by direct assault the Col della Berretta, capturing 600 prisoners; the enemy, surprised by the extreme ardor of the incursion, counter-attacked from every direction in the endeavor to surround the Arditi, but these heroically broke through the hostile forces, and reentered the lines they had left with prisoners.

The 18th Assault Detachment and elements of the Pesaro Brigade (239th Regiments), after six hours of bitter struggle, and after severe losses, but also after having inflicted greater losses upon the enemy, confirmed their hold upon Mt. Pertica and captured the few surviving troops of the enemy together with more than 40 machine-guns, which had defended the exceedingly strong peak.

The Bologna Brigade (39th and 40th Regiments) took Mt. Forcelletta by storm and continued their advance to the base of the peak of Col del Cuc, taking prisoners and materials. Infantry of the Lombardy Brigade (73rd, 74th Regiments) and Alpini of the Battalions « Val Cordevole » and « Levenna » renewed their assaults time after time against the bare, shell-swept summit of the Solarolo, but without succeeding in gaining possession of it.

During this day of hard fighting more than 1400 prisoners were captured. It was a desperate struggle on the entire front, but not a vain struggle. Besides having lost positions of capital importance (Mt. Pertica and Mt. Forcelletta), the enemy, profoundly shaken by the power and violence of the attack, and perceiving the increasing peril of a breach in the line in the direction of Feltre, employed in his defense in the region of the Grappa not only his immediate reserves, but also those which he held in the rear about Feltre and Belluno. Thus, he had deprived himself of just those forces which it was important for us to keep engaged, in order to prevent their being shifted to the front opposing our Eighth Army.

During the 26th, the battle on Mt. Grappa continued to be intense, bitter, with continual fluctuations. Our men captured 1,200 prisoners. Two of the reserve divisions and the artillery of a third were used to strengthen the enemy front, which thus had in line between the Brenta and the Piave 9 divisions opposed to 7 Italian divisions; but our divisions continued to attack and to carry out with the utmost determination their exceedingly severe task of wearing the enemy down.

The Forcing of the Piave. By the evening of the 26th conditions had improved; the violence of the current had diminished, so that the work of throwing bridges across the Piave was begun; 1 in front of the Twelfth Army at Molinetto (Pederobba), 7 in front of the Eighth Army between Fontana del Buoro (Montello) and the destroyed bridge of Priula; 3 in front of the Tenth Army at the Grave di Papadopoli. But of these means of crossing, the well regulated artillery fire of the enemy and the violence of the current prevented us from completing more than 6: 1 at Molinetto, 2 between Fontana del Buoro and the salient of Falzè, 3 at the Grave di Papadopoli.

Across the bridges constructed, and with the assistance of fords and boats, the first detachments succeeded in reaching the left bank of the river; and here, accompanied with remarkable efficacy by the fire of our artillery from the right bank, they hurled themselves upon the enemy lines and took them.

At daybreak, the troops which had crossed the Piave formed three bridge-heads. The first bridgehead, in the vicinity of Valdobbiadene, was held by 3 battalions of the 138th Regiment of French Infantry and 3 battalions of Italian Alpini, all from the Twelfth Army, and by a regiment of the Campania Brigade belonging to the Eighth Army (27th Corps), which had crossed, however, on the bridge at Molinetto built by the Twelfth Army. Toward evening, after hard fighting, these troops had reached the line Osteria Nuova-San Vito-Madonna di Caravaggio-Funer-Ca' Settolo.

The second bridgehead, in the plain of Sernaglia, was formed by troops of the 8th army: — at the left the Cuneo Brigade (7th and 8th Regiments) and other elements of the 27th Corps which had not been able to construct its own bridges; in the center the greater part of the 57th Division; and at the right the 1st Assault Division and the 72nd Assault Detachment of the 22nd Corps, accompanied by three mountain batteries. At the right of the 22nd Corps, the 18th Corps, because of the violence of the river and the accurate fire of the batteries of the enemy, which continually destroyed the bridge, did not succeed in establishing any passage on its own sector, between Falzè and Nervesa.

While the gallant troops of the Eighth Army, already across the river, fought stubbornly under a violent storm of fire, and conquered the enemy's defenses, one after another, all the bridges in their rear were shot to pieces by artillery or swept away by the current. Notwithstanding this most difficult

situation, which might at any moment become tragic, these troops fearlessly pressed their action throughout the day, enlarging the extent of their occupation and resisting vigorous counter-attacks.

In a resolute attack toward the north and the east, the 1st Assault Division occupied Falzè and Chiesuola; the 57th Division, operating at the left of the 1st Assault Division, advanced toward the north; the Cuneo Brigade still further to the left, resting upon the river, resisted with complete success the most violent counter-attacks launched by the enemy. The 72nd Assault Detachment, attacked near C. Mira and Boaria del Magazino by forces three times superior in numbers, repulsed these forces, counter-attacked, surrounded them, and captured them. During the night other counter-attacks toward Sernaglia were repulsed, while violent infantry actions of the enemy toward Falzè compelled the 1st Assault Division to retire slightly. The general situation, however, remained unchanged.

The third bridgehead was formed by the Tenth Army, which crossed the second branch of the Piave betwen the Grave di Papadopoli and the left bank of the river, broke through the enemy's defense, and extended its lines on the plain of Cimadolmo. Serious resistance met the advance of the Ilth Italian Corps (the right wing of the Tenth Army), which had to withdraw its right slowly toward evening under a counter-attack. At the same time the 14th British Corps (the left wing of the Tenth Army) fought strenuously around Borgo Malanotte, which it had to abandon under violent enemy attacks, but immediately reoccupied in an impetuous counter-attack. More than 5,600 prisoners and 24 cannon were taken in all by the Tenth Army.

The capture of Vittorio. During the night of the 27th uninterrupted efforts were put forth to repair the broken bridges, in the face of all the difficulties created by rains, which augmented the volume and the velocity of the water, and by the enemy, who had intensified the fire of his artillery and the use of gas and pyrite shells.

Again, during this second night, the 8th Corps did not succeed in throwing any bridge across the stream in its front between Falzè and Nervesa, so that an extensive gap was created beyond the river between the troops of the Eighth Army and those of the Tenth. In order to fill this gap and to aid the passage of the 8th Corps, to which had been entrusted the crucial action against Vittorio, the Command of the Eighth Army had already arrranged

that another corps of the army, the 18th, from its own reserve, should pass the Piave on the bridges of the Tenth Army in order to operate during the 28th at the left flank of this army in the direction from south to north, aiming toward Conegliano and thus relieving, in a great measure, the front of the Eighth Army so that this army might in turn effect a safe passage during the following night.

On the morning of the 28th the 18th Corps began the passage at Salettuol on bridges of the Tenth Army, although these had been broken during the night and repaired with great difficulty; and, at the same time, new troops of the Twelfth and Eighth Armies (27th and 28th Corps) passed the river between Pederobba and Falzè.

The action was renewed along the whole front.

The entire Twelfth Army attacked astride the Piave toward the north; captured Alano on the right of the river and the height of Valdobbiadene (Mt. Tianar and Mt. Perlo) on the left; and took some thousands of prisoners.

Meanwhile, on the front of the Eighth Army the troops of the 27th and 28th Corps, who were the first from that army to cross the river and who were now isolated by a fresh destruction of their bridges, resisted fearlessly continuous counter attacks; while the unwearied Italian artillery protected them from the right bank by an overwhelming bombardment of the enemy, and aeroplanes conveyed to them food, ammunition, and blankets. The tenacity of all broughtsafely through the crisis.

The 18th Corps, when only the Como Brigade (23rd and 24th Regiments) and a regiment of the Bisagno Brigade (209th and 210th Regiments) had succeeded in passing the river, hurled these troops forward impetuously in an attack upward along the left bank of the Piave, and by the evening, after having broken down all resistance of the enemy, had passed the Susegana railway opposite the bridges of Priula. A way was now open for the advance of the 8th Corps.

Further south, the 14th British Corps and the 11th Italian Corps of the Tenth Army, widened the breach already opened in the Kaiserstellung, and extended their lines toward the east over the plain as far as the line of Monticano.

The array of the adversary on the left bank of the Piave was now broken into two great masses. That to the south had been immobilized by the Tenth Army: and the mass to the north, still holding firmly to the hills of Cone-

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gliano, had to withdraw to avoid an involving movement of the 8th Corps. The Eighth Army recovered its freedom of movement and the manœuver resumed its persistent development.

In the early hours of the 29th the 8th Corps bridged the river at Ponte della Priula and in its turn launched an attack, broke the enemy line at Marcatelli, and captured Susegana. Then, while the 18th Corps occupied Conegliano, the 8th Corps sent forward a flying column at utmost speed (the Lancfers of Florence and the bicycle Bersaglieri) to occupy Vittorio, which was reached in the evening.

At the same time the troops of the 12th army. — Alpini of the 52nd Division, infantry of the 23rd French Division and of the 1st Italian Corps, — captured Mt. Cesen, a position of the utmost importance because it dominates the Quero gorge and the road toward the Feltre basin. These troops also occupied Segusino and reached Quero. Especially notable was the advance of the 52nd Division to the capture of Mt. Cesen — achieved after the very greatest difficulties of terrain had been overcome, difficulties rendered more serious by the tenacious resistance of the enemy.

Thereupon columns of the Eighth Army broke into the gorge of San Pietro di Barbozza-Serradalle and passed beyond Follina. The Tenth Army crossed the Monticano on a wide front.

More than 8,000 prisoners and about a hundred cannon were captured in all on the 31st by the Twelfth, Eighth, and Tenth Armies.

In the meanwhile along the front of the Fourth Army the enemy, more and more committed to the battle, had passed on the 27th to a counter-offensive and launched eight attacks in succession against Mt. Pertica, all of which were repulsed. For six hours the struggle raged around the top, and the dead were heaped along the rocky slopes.

At the Valderoa, the Aosta Brigade (5th and 6th Regiments), although overwhelmed by superior forces, held the summit and refused to yield.

An implacable artillery action was developed from our side on the 28th. On the 29th, the artillery battle became more violent at the Asolone and in Val Cesilla. The Italian columns attempted to advance from the Asolone to Col della Berretta, in order to assist in extending the occupation of the Pertica and in the capture of Prassolan and Solarolo, and in order to press forward along the mountain buttresses of the Roncone and the Tomatico to the conquest of the Feltre basin. The enemy opposed a bitter resistance, counter-

attacked desperately, and threw into the struggle his last reserves, till he had 11 divisions in the line.

Thus the Fourth Army, although unable to reach the material objective assigned to it - to break effectually the communications between the enemy troops of the Alpine zone and those of the plain, - succeeded, nevertheless, by the tenacity of its immediate cooperation, in exhausting the reserves which the adversary held in the Feltre basin, and preventing them from being sent to the plain to repair the breach by this time opened by the troops of the Eighth, Tenth, and Twelfth Armies.

The defeat of the enemy.

The defeat of the enemy.

The defeat of the enemy, already probable on the 28th, was certain on the 29th, and precipitate on the 30th. Under the irresistible combined pressure of the three armies of manœuver, the front feverishly prepared by the enemy in positions in the rear was again broken through at additional points.

The Eighth Army achieved brilliantly the task assigned to it. Swinging toward the left in a rapid advance, it rushed the ridge of the sub-Alpine heights to the east of Mt. Cesen, opposite the Fadalto gorge and at Cansiglio, and directed its movement toward the valley junction of Belluno. The 1st Cavalry Division was sent forward between the Eighth and the Tenth Army to reach the Livenza to the north of Sacile, and, further still, the Tagliamento.

In the situation thus described, the High Command thought that the moment had at length arrived to bring into action the troops drawn up along the lower Piave.

The Third Army, under the orders of H. R. H. the Duke of Aosta, which had engaged the enemy contantly on that front and awaited with eager expectation the arrival of its hour, now received the command to attack. With the support of a division sent across the bridges of the Tenth Army and turned toward the south along the Piave, it forced in a bitter contest the crossing at Ponte di Piave, Salgareda, Romanziol, and San Dona, and advanced decisively upon the plain, although powerfully opposed by the adversary, who struggled fiercely in a stubborn rearguard action to cover the withdrawal of his artillery. More than 3,000 prisoners were captured on that day.

By evening, after lively contests, the troops of the Twelfth Army had forced an opening in the Quero gorge and had extended their occupation of the heights of Cesen. The Eighth Army, after reaching the crest of the ridge of hills between Mt. Cesen and Mt. Pezza, was fighting in the pass of San Boldo. Farther to the east, it had forced the defile of Serravalle, to the north of Vittorio, and had passed Breda Fregosa, Sarmede, and Caneva. The Tenth and the Third Army were advancing toward the line of the Livenza.

The battle was developing with the right rhythm, expanding according to the pre-established plan.

The Austro-Hungarian Command, deceived by our two efforts at the flanks, the Grappa and the Grave di Papadopoli, had permitted its reserves in the Feltre region to be absorbed at the Grappa, and had allowed most of its reserves on the plain to be drawn to the front of the Tenth Army, whose function was to form a defensive flank. Then every effort to check our rapid irruption from Vittorio toward the valley of Belluno could do no more than to check the advance, and the encircling manœuver toward the rear of Mt. Grappa already began to promise the greatest results.

The collapse of the front at Mt. Grappa.

The threat of the Twelfth Army, which had taken

the Quero defile on the 30th and was already bearing toward Feltre, very soon showed the promise of far-reaching effects, and led us to believe that the decisive movement was at hand for the sector at Grappa.

In fact, during the night of the 30th and 31st, the main body of the enemy's forces received unexpected orders and began under cover of darkness its withdrawal on the front Fonzasu-Feltre, in order to cover with the cooperation of the defense organized further to the east, at the San Boldo pass, and the Fadalto defile, the line of communications of the upper Piave. The Command of the Fourth Army, taking into consideration what had happened in the other sectors, suspected this movement and ordered its troops to renew their advance.

The withdrawal of the enemy was completed under the protection of very heavy rearguards in extremely strong positions, and supported by hundreds of machine-guns and numerous cannon left in place. These rearguards had been ordered to keep up their resistance as long as possible to give time for the main body of troops to make an orderly retirement to the line chosen for the second defense, and in order that the enormous masses of cannon, munitions, and materials of every sort accumulated in the mountains might be removed. With a vigorous effort the attacking columns of the Fourth

Army overthrew the enemy rearguards, captured the positions long contested, and rushed forward toward the Feltre basin by way of the buttresses of the Comatico and the Roncone and the intervening valley of Seren.

The Ancona Brigade (69th and 80th Regiments) of the Sixth Army, supporting at the left the movement of the Fourth, advanced swiftly in the Val di Brenta, and occupied Cismon, surprising there the entire command of a hostile regiment and capturing 1,000 men and 9 six-inch guns, which, even to the very last, had been firing blindly on Bassano.

By evening, the Fourth Army, after having overcome successive lines of obstinate resistance took with its left flank the valley of Roncone and pushed forward detachments into the Arsie-Arten valley. The 91st Infantry Regiment (Basilicata Brigade) cut off and captured at Corlo, in Val di Cismon, an entire enemy brigade.

In the center the Bologna Brigade (39th and 40th Regiments) and the Lombardy Brigade (73rd and 74th Regiments), advancing through the Val di Seren, and the Alpini of the « Mt. Pelmo », « Exilles », « Pieve di Cadore » battalions advancing across the mountains, entered the valley of Arten-Feltre, and the « Exilles » and « Pieve di Cadore » battalions entered first into Feltre, at 5:30 in the afternoon, amid the enthusiasm of the population, driving out the disorganized enemy, confused as to his direction, and capturing more than 2,000 prisoners. Among these prisoners was a company of engineers charged with the duty of destroying the bridges, which remained intact. Shortly afterward, the Bologna Brigade and the Alpini battalion « Mt. Pelmo » arrived. The first group of squadrons of the Padua Light Cavalry Regiment (21st), which was in the plain, hastened forward in pursuit, crossed during the night the summit of Grappa, and in a wonderful march through difficult footpaths descended into the Val di Seren, where they emerged the morning of November 1st and moved toward Belluno, charging and dispersing on the way a Bosniac regiment.

On the right the Aosta Brigade (5th and 6th Regiments) and the Udine Brigade (95th and 96th Regiments) pressed forward through Val Calcino and Val Cinesta across the bulwark of the Spinoncia and Mt. Zoc, and cut off in the Schievenin gorge the remaining forces facing the 1st Corps of our army, the left wing of the Twelfth.

On the same day, the 31st, the Twelfth Army, following up its advance beyond the Quero defile and the ridge of the sub-Alps reached the Piave in the evening between Lentiai and Mel. The Eighth Army, after having completed its converging movement toward the left, overcame in ten hours of fighting the resistance of the enemy at San Boldo pass, and then descended to the Piave east of Mel; captured the Fadalto defile, sent forward an advance guard toward Ponte nelle Alpi, and occupied with swift columns the Piave di Cansiglio.

At the Livenza. On the 29th, the High Command, foreseeing the collapse of the enemy front, had ordered the Cavalry Corps (the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Divisions) to cross over to the left bank of the Piave, and assigned this corps the duty of preventing the enemy from securing the crossings of the Tagliamento between Pinzano and the sea, both in order to cut off the enemy's columns in retreat and to prevent the destruction of the bridges.

On the 31st the Cavalry Corps, under the command of H. R. H. the Count of Turin, overcame the obstinate resistance of enemy detachments and debouched on the plain beyond the front of the Tenth Army. At dawn on the 31st, patrols of the Vittorio Emanuele (10th) and Milano (7th) Lancers entered Oderzo.

At the same time the 1st Division, under direct orders from the Command of the Eighth Army, surprising the enemy near Fiaschetti, and, preventing him from destroying the bridge over the Livenza, crossed the stream, and, together with the 4th Genoa Regiment, attacked the rear-guards holding the opposite bank, overcame them, and pursued them toward Vigonovo, capturing prisoners and machine-guns. That night the division occupied Vigonovo and Cordignano.

Close behind the 1st Cavalry Division the 3rd Cavalry Division crossed the Livenza by the bridge at Fiaschetti, hurried forward to Polcenigo and took by storm the defile firmly held by the enemy — thanks to the decisive action of the horse battery of the 3rd Artillery Group and the cyclists of the regiment of Montebello Lanciers (8th) and the Vicenza Light Cavalry (24th). The division then sent forward patrols to the Tagliamento.

Reconnaissance detachments of the 4th Division, sent forward to the Livenza in the Sacile valley, found the left bank occupied by the enemy, and all bridges destroyed. A group of the Guide Light Cavalry Regiment (19th) attacked Sacile, which was strongly defended, and captured it, with the aid of British infantry, after an obstinate contest from house to house.

The Tenth Army reached the Livenza from Sacile to Motta and the Third Army pushed its advance guards to this river from Motta to the sea, after overcoming by stubborn determination numerous hindrances on the roads—barricades, wire entanglements, and extensive floods.

After the fall of Vittorio and the collapse of the sector at the Grappa, the retirement of the enemy front extended from east to west.

After the occupation of the Feltre basin, the enemy sector of the Asiago plateau was seriously shaken.

From October 24th, as has been said, the Sixth Army, which had in its line the 48th British Division and the 24th French Division, had supported the Fourth Army loyally and directly with all of its batteries that were so placed as to bear upon the Grappa sector, and indirectly, but in an important manner, by an energetic pressure along its own front through partial but continuous and daring infantry actions. On October 28th, forewarned by these actions of ours, and concerned over the movements developing at his left, the enemy retired to the « Winterstellung » previously prepared along the edges of the Gallio woods and on the slopes of Mt. Rasca and Mt. Interrotto, abandoning the Asiago basin, which was immediately occupied by our watchful troops of the Sixth Army.

On October 30th because of indications on the plateau, — fires and ammunition explosions in the rear — that the enemy was preparing to carry out a retirement on a more extensive scale, the decision was reached that the Sixth Army, although its forces had been reduced for the sake of the principal action, should make an attack upon the front of Mt. Mosciagh-Stenfle-Portecche. This action, prepared on the morning of the 31st by the storming of flank positions of the enemy (Malaghetto at the extreme right, and Cima Tre Pezzi - Fortino Stella - Canove at the left), was prosecuted in the evening with the object of advancing at the first possible moment to Levico and Caldonazzo, in order to intercept the highroad and the Valsugana railway so as to block the principal route for the evacuation of the enemy troops, who were giving ground along the front of our Fourth, Twelfth, and Eighth Armies.

The pursuit. A complete withdrawal of the entire enemy front had been clearly foreseen since the morning of the 31st. The collapse of the entire front at the Grappa already clearly perceptible, and the advance of the Eighth Army toward the valley junction of Belluno, were now opening

for us with certainty the roads of Cadore, of the Agordino, of the Val Cismon, and rendering it possible for us to carry out the second phase of the central plan of the great manœuver and bring to bear a threat of disaster to the Austrian armies of the Trentino. In short, all these enemy troops would be cut of from all possibility of escape. The withdrawal, which could be perceived also upon the plateau on the morning of the 31st, was a clear indication that the enemy realized the gravity of the situation and was attempting to withdraw in order to save himself, at least in part, and that this retiring-movement would, therefore, quickly extend to the entire front as far as the Stelvio. The victory was thus decisive and it behooved us to take advantage of it. The entire army must needs advance from the Stelvio to the sea as one enormous avalanche in order to overwhelm the enemy everywhere, directing its strongest forces in those directions which would avail to cut the enemy's lines of retirement and annihilate him.

The orders were given the morning of November lst. They were as follows: — The First Army was to advance to Trent; the Sixth Army toward the Egna-Trent front; the Fourth Army toward the Bolzano-Egna front; the Eighth Army well beyond the valley junction of Belluno, along the Cadore road (the upper Piave) and along the Agordo road between Brunek and Bolzano, pressing forward a detachment to Toblach; the Seventh Army toward the front Mezzolombardo-Bolzano. In substance, the orders were that all should move forward rapidly and energetically toward the origins of the adversaries' lines of communication in order to choke them. At the same time orders were issued that frontal engagements should be avoided as far as possible outside of the lines of envelopment, since such engagements would cause useless losses, while results more extensive and decisive could be obtained through the natural and foreseen effect of the manœuver.

The Twelfth Army, which had completed its task and had no space for a further advance, received instructions to assemble in the Feltre basin and await orders; the Tenth and Third Armies were ordered to advance to the Tagliamento and the Cavalry Corps to move forward and prevent the enemy from reaching the bridges of the Isonzo.

Meanwhile, on the same day, November st, the Eighth Army continued its advance vigorously. At 11 o' clock, after columns of the Twelfth Army and of the Eighth had occupied Fonzaso and Feltre defiles, by the capture of the height overlooking these from the north the 253rd Infantry Regiment

(Brigade of Porto Maurizio), after four nights of fighting, entered Belluno: cutting the communications with the upper Piave of the enemy troops in retirement from Feltre and thus forcing them to concentrate in the Cordevole valley. Another column of the Eighth Army, coming from Fadalto, descended upon Ponte nelle Alpi and advanced at once toward Longarone and Pieve di Cadore. The Fourth Army sent its left flank (21 st Division) on a forced march through the Val Brenta, and passed beyond Grigno, smashing the obstinate resistance which the enemy was opposing and thus closing the outlet of the so-called Marcesina highroad, which descends straight from the Asiago plateau to Grigno.

The cutting of his communications thus The recapture of the plateaux. had now begun to render even more critical the situation of the enemy troops of the Asiago plateau. There, on the same day, November 1st, the Italian troops, after overcoming the most tenacious resistance had gained very important advantages. Preceded by the 52 nd and 70th Assault Detachments, which broke the line running through Mt. Ferragh, Pendici, north Sisemol, Stenfle, Melaghetto, and Ghelpach-Eck-Covola-Val Ronchi, the troops of the 13th Italian Army Corps and the 24th French Division had reached, on the morning of November 1st, Mt. Longara and at noon the line Mt. Nos-Casera Meletta-Ristecco, and had thus opened an enormous breach in the enemy's front lines. The favorable situation was immediately exploited by the advance of the 21st French Division toward Mt. Nos, Mt. Cimone, and Mt. Baldo to occupy the artery of communication between Campomulo and Val di Nos, and by the advance of Italian troops in pursuit toward the line of Mt. Sbarbatal-Fiera-Colombara-Val Galmarara, for the purpose of assisting at the left the advance of the 48th British Division (12th Corps of the Italian Army). This division found itself faced by insurmountable resistance in the positions Camporovere-Rasta-Interroto, the defenses of the Val d'Assa (the principal line of retirement of the enemy) and was manœuvering to take him on the flank and the rear over Mt. Mosciagh.

The valorous British troops, keeping up the combat throughout the night, succeeded in getting possession of Mt. Mosciagh and Mt. Interroto, and joined there another division of the Corps (20th Italian), which had forced a passage over the Assa between Rotzo and Roano to the western edge of the plateau.

Along the eastern edge of this plateau the Italian troops had taken by

storm on the same day, at the cost of desperate efforts, the tremendously strong system of fortifications of the Melette. Mt. Bedenecche, Mt. Lambara and Sasso Rosso, and a dashing advance had secured a firm hold upon Mt. Lisser. At the edge of Val Brenta, detachments of the 70th Infantry Regiment (The Ancona Brigade) scaled with the greatest difficulty, by means of ropes, the precipitous sides of Mt. Spitz and Mt. Chior, upon which the enemy was keeping up an obstinate resistance, and had succeeded in capturing the level top, taking in the action 35 cannon of all calibres, which were immediately turned against the enemy fleeing toward Enego.

Some tens of thousands of prisoners and almost all the artillery of the Asiago plateau was the remarkable booty of the Sixth Army in this first day of its participation in the battle.

To return to the plain, the 3rd Cavalry Division, after a long fight and by an able manœuver, broke the resistance of heavy rearguards of the enemy, supported by artillery — on the line San Martino-Sedrano-San Quirino- Nogaredo; and pursued him toward the Tagliamento, reaching the plain to the north of the city of Pordenone, previously occupied at 2 o' clock by the 4th Division which had crossed the Meduna.

The Tenth and Third Armies were engaged during November 1st in consolidating their crossings over the Livenza. The Tenth Army succeeded in crossing this stream between Sacile and Motta; the Third got possession of bridgeheads at Motta, Livenza, and Tezze, defended everywhere with desperate stubbornness by rearguards of the enemy.

At Trent. The manœuver ordered for November 1st, faithfully executed by all the Commands and performed with dash by the troops, began to show its amplitude on the 2nd and attained its full results on the 3rd.

The First Army, warned as early as October 30th — although reduced to only five divisions and a group of Alpini for a front of 60 kilometres — had assembled in preparation in the Val Lagarina an attacking mass sufficient to give a direct and decisive blow in the direction assigned to it: that of Trent. To occupy Trent by a direct onslaught meant the cutting of all the enemy's lines in the rear from the Brenta to the Lake of Garda, it involved also a threat to those of the sectors to the west of the lake, and would cut off at one blow the possibility of rearguard actions which might have been very bitter, because of the facility for defensive action afforded by the mountain defiles.

At the flanks of the mass for attack, upon the slopes of the Altissimo and at Pasubio the lateral troops were instructed to hold the enemy by vigorous actions. Meanwhile, at the extreme right of the army, the 10th Corps, accompanying the forward movement of the Sixth Army on the Asiago Plateau, had attacked on the night of the 1st in the Val d'Astico, with the object of ascending the valley itself and thus threatening to surround the forces of the enemy on the Tonezza-Folgaria plateaux so as to separate them from those of the Asiago-Lavarone plateaux. The first attack against the enemy defense failed; the second overcame the resistance. A column moved forward rapidly through the Val d'Astico as far as Lastebasse, assisting the advance of other troops on the Conezza plateau and constituting a salient of great depth threatening the enemy troops in front of this army.

On the 2nd the moment was, therefore, propitious for carrying out the movement in Val Lagarina.

Toward 3 o' clock the 29th Assault Detachment hurled itself with tremendous vehemence upon the Serravello defenses, annihilated the garrison in a fierce hand to hand fight, and rushed impetuously into the narrow breach, followed immediately by the 4th group of Alpini (the battalions « Mt. Pavione », « Mt. Arvenis » and Feltre Battalions). At 8.45 in the evening, after new and successive defenses of the enemy had been overcome, the Arditi and the Alpini entered Rovereto and occupied it, capturing several hundred prisoners and deciding also, by an encircling movement, the fate of the enemy's forces, which, although driven from Pasubio and from Passo della Borcola by the impetus of our attacking columns of the 5th Corps, were still defending themselves fiercely in Val Terragnolo and in Vallarsa.

Squadrons of the Alessandria Light Cavalry (14th) were immediately sent forward on the road to Trent, which they were the first to enter, at 3.15 in the afternoon of the 3rd, together with the indefatigable Arditi of the 39th Assault Detachment, the Arditi of the 4th Alpini Group, and the 10th Group of Mountain Artillery. Amid the delirious enthusiasm of the population, and before an immense throng of Austrian soldiers surprised in the city, the Italian tri-color was unfurled from the Castello del Buon Consiglio.

The final resistance. At the extreme right of the front of manœuver, columns of the Eighth Army overthrew the enemy defenses at Mis in Val Cordevole and at Ponte nelle Alpi in the plain of Vodola, at Fortogna, and at Longarone: plunged forward into the Agordo

basin and reached Cencenighe, extending upon the valley of the upper Piave and in Val Boite, occupying Domegge, Chiapuzza, and Selva.

Advance guards of the Twelfth Army, which were being assembled in the Feltre basin, cooperated in the meanwhile with troops of the Fourth Army in overcoming the resistance at Ponte della Serra and defeated rear guards to the northwest of Pedavena, enlarging the region of occupation in the mountains to the north of Feltre.

On the front of the Fourth Army bitter fighting resulted victoriously for us on the 2nd and 3rd in the Valsugana; after overcoming the resistance of the enemy near Castelnuovo, where he had endeavored to bar the road to Trent and to cover the retirement of his columns from Borgo toward Val d'Avisio, our advance guards were pushed still further forward. At 6 o'clock on the 3rd the first squadron of cavalry of Padua entered Levico; at 8 o'clock in the evening they entered Pergine; at 10 o'clock they reached Trent, where they joined the advance guards of the First Army.

During the 2nd and 3rd a column occupied the Tesino basin.

At the defile of Fonzaso, the enemy, supported by very strong systems of caves, defended the bridge of the Serra fiercely during the 2nd, in order to cover the exit of his troops along the Val di Cismon. But he was overthrown and Fonzaso was occupied before mid-day; our people in the town had aided the Italian troops and guided them against the Austrian rearguards, which defended themselves desperately. Some of these people, both men and women, paid with their lives for their patriotic ardor.

Columns sent forward across the mountains reached, at 2 o' clock on the 4th, Fierra di Primiero, where they cut off and captured 10,000 prisoners, 60 cannon, and all the transport of the 26th Austrian Army Corps and occupied Canal San Bovo.

On the plateaux, the Sixth Army, after fierce fighting sustained during the 2nd and the 3rd with strong enemy rearguards, and after exhausting marches up and down the mountains, reached, on the 3rd, Caldonazzo and Levico, and on the 4th, Roncegno. The 7th army, entering the battle in the afternoon of the 2nd with a violent artillery action at the Stelvio and Lake Oarda, had begun on the night of the 3rd the ascent of Mt. Pari, in order to descend from it on the other side in the Riva basin and lend assistance to the left wing of the First Army, which was there advancing toward the Altissimo.

During the 3rd, after overcoming the troops holding the Val Chiese and

Tornale, where the entire garrisons were surprised and taken with their arms, the fierce resistance at the Stelvio was also broken and the troops of the Seventh Army debouched into the Val Giudicarie, Val Vermiglio, and Val Trafoi; descended into Val di Sarca and at Riva, and detachments of the First Army crossed Lake Garda in boats of the Royal Marine. In an extremely rapid advance from Val Vermiglio, accomplished by the most strenuous exertions, Alpini in automobiles, light cavalry, and mounted artillery, surmounted all the obstacles in the way, passed Male and blocked at Dimaro the outlets of the roads of Madonna di Campiglio for the enemy troops in retreat from Giudicarie, insuring thus the capture of the entire Command of the 20th Army Corps and the whole 49th Division of troops and services. These troops then advanced to Cies and the hills of Mendolan Col, 15 kilometres from Bolzano. A column descended from the Stelvio into Val Venosta, and there cut the communications between the upper Adige and the Tyrol through the Reschen Pass.

Other advance guards, hurried forward from the Giudicarie by the swiftest means of conveyance, reached, on the morning of the 4th, Mezzolombardo. This advance force constituted the left arm of the great mass of manœuver which had grasped Trent with its right arm; thus seizing in an iron vise the enemy army of Trentino, for which retreat through the Val d'Adige to Merano and Bolzano was now also impossible.

On the plain, likewise, the enemy, pressed upon without cessation by the troops of the Tenth and the Third Army, retreated in feverish haste, leaving vast amounts of booty in our hands and several thousand prisoners. Indeed, the whole Austro-Hungarian army was at length in complete collapse over the entire length of its front, from the Stelvio to the sea; its columns were in flight, everywhere pursued, headed off, blocked by our swift advance guards.

The debarkation at Trieste. On November 3rd, at about the same hour in which detachments of Italian cavalry entered Trent and Udine, our Bersaglieri debarked at Trieste and the tricolor was hoisted on the tower of San Giusto.

For some time previously, the High Command, in association with the Royal Marine, had been studying a bold plan for landing a force on the coast of Istria, and had chosen the promontory of Pirano as a point of debarkation, from which to set out at the opportune moment for the advance on Trieste. A contingent of select forces was to be concentrated at Venice

for this purpose and all necessary previous arrangements for the debarkation had been completed. But when the collapse of the enemy front became definitive, the original plan was altered, and the decision was reached to effect the debarkation at the very city of Trieste, another shining goal like Trent, to every heart in Italy.

On November 1st and 2nd an expeditionary force was rapidly concentrated at Venice, consisting of the 2nd Bersagliere Brigade (7th and 11th Regiments) and other minor elements of special branches. The Royal Marine, although it had to overcome difficulties of every description, was ready to effect the transportation. On the morning of November 3rd the convoy of Italian boats bearing the liberators set out; in the afternoon, it arrived before the harbor of Trieste.

At 4 o' clock of the same day a battalion of Bersaglieri and a company of machine-gunners of the Royal Marine set foot on the soil of the redeemed city, greeted with impressive enthusiasm by all the citizens, who shad come down to the quay to welcome their liberators.

The cavalry action. With the brilliance and dash characteristic of its traditions the cavalry achieved its task of pursuing the enemy, of dispersing and capturing his columns in flight, of securing river crossings for the infantry advancing under its protection.

The 1st Division, which was under the orders of the Eighth Army, had been sent to Vittorio the morning of November 1st. Here the order reached the division to pass under the command of the Cavalry Corps, and to advance through Maniago and Pinzano, to occupy the road junction of Stazione per la Carnia, and to close the exit by the Passo della Mauria with a column which should descend through the valley of the Meduna to the Tagliamanto between Ampezzo and Tolmezzo. The 3rd Division received imstructions to follow the enemy toward Udine and Cividale, in order to block the roads in the Natisone basin; the 4th was ordered to advance through Pozzuolo and Cormons toward Gorizia; the 2nd to pursue the enemy in the direction Palmanova-Monfalcone.

After overcoming a brief resistance at Meduna, a column of the First Division occupied Maniago and Travesio, in the evening of November 2nd; overcame new defenses of the enemy, captured Pinzano, and the heights of Campeis, on the 3rd, and reached on the following day, after other lively encounters, Tolmezzo and Stazione per la Carnia, surprising the command

and a great part of the 34th Austrian Division. At 3 o' clock the motor machine-gun of the column (the 8th Squadron), after capturing a Corps commander, stopped with machine-gun fire a train moving toward Pontebba and entered Chiusa-Forte. A detachment reached Pontebba, and at the same hour the column coming from the valley of the Meduna arrived at Palmezzo. Between Gemona and Venzone three Austrian divisions (the 41st Honved, 51st Honved, and 12th Dismounted Cavalry) were cut off. By permission of the High Command, they were later permitted free passage toward Pontebba, after leaving behind their cannon and rifles.

The 3rd Cavalry Division, informed by detachments of its own that two enemy columns had taken a course during the night toward the bridge of Pinzano and that of Bonzicco, respectively, sent forward from Pauriano, during the morning of November 2nd, the Saluzzo Cavalry Regiment (12th) to Pinzano and the Montenello Regiment (8th) of Lanciers toward Bonzicco. The Saluzzo Regiment charged and dispersed near Istrago the column which it was pursuing, and arrived at Pinzano with prisoners and cannon. The Lanciers of Montebello, supported by a Horse Artillery Battery, finding the enemy — the advance guard of an enemy division — in the buildings of Barbeano and Provesano, dismounted and engaged them; overcame all resistance; and captured prisoners.

The rest of the 3rd Division, after capturing Spilimbergo in a direct attack from enemy rear-guards armed with machine guns and cannon, sent forward a regiment of Savoy cavalry to the Tagliamento. The main part of the division forded the Tagliamento the morning of November 3rd near San Odorico and found the left bank of the river defended by an entire Austrian division (the 44th) with 20 batteries. By a surprise move, it forced a breach through the infantry and, falling upon the artillery, compelled the enemy to surrender. A squadron of the Savoy regiment galloped forward and entered Udine at 1:30.

On the following day, at 11 o'clock, the entire 3 rd Cavalry Division reached Udine, and proceeded to Cividale. At 3 o'clock advance parties were at Robia.

The 4th Division occupied Cordenons after lively actions at dawn on November 2nd; and, finding the bridge of Bonzicco destroyed by the enemy, sent forward Bersaglieri cyclists of the 3rd Group (lst, 7th and 8th battalions) toward the bridges of Delizia. The enemy had blown these up and was defending himself at a bridgehead already prepared. On November 3rd, the division forded the river near San Odorico and aided in disarming the 44th Austrian Division; extended its own columns on the plain, and assaulted and

captured a strong enemy detachment equipped with artillery and machine guns near the Galeriano cemetery, and other groups which resisted near Flumignacco; and compelled the surrender of troops and commands of the enemy in the zone of Possuolo del Friuli.

At 3 o'clock on November 4th, swift detachments were at Cormons, Manzano, and Buttrio.

The 2nd Division arrived with the 3rd Pordenone Brigade at the Tagliamento on November 4th; forded it, and advanced through Codroito toward Palmanova; overcame the tenacious resistance of the rear guard of the enemy drawn up in Morano; and entered Mortegliano at 3 o' clock. Advanced detachments had passed beyond Palmanova and reached Joanniz.

Another column of the division (the 4th Brigade) captured in a vigorous attack on the 3rd, Bagnano, Cordovado, Saccudello; and passed the Tagliamento at Latizana on the 4th, a regiment of Mantua Lanciers (25th) charged the enemy repeatedly near Palazzolo della Stella and at Talmasson, and captured prisoners. A regiment of the Aosta Lancers (6th) captured two enemy columns near Pocenia: entered Cermiolo at 3 o'clock and charged the enemy at a gallop with its standard at its head.

A swift column which was preceding the 4th Brigade — cavalry cyclists, Bersaglieri cyclists, motor machine-gunners, and later two squadrons of the Piedmont Royal Cavalry (2nd) — overcame successive resistances, and occupied before 3 o'clock on November 4th, Cervignano and Grado.

Thus in gallant charges, in dashing raids, requiring notable efforts, — among these, especially the marches of the 1st and 2nd Divisions — in an advance continuing from October 29th to November 4th and reaching to a depth varying from 200 to 250 kilometres, often without either food or forage, because of the speed of their movement, the cavalry corps accomplished its task brilliantly.

The armistice. At three o'clock on November 4th hostilities were suspended on the entire front, in accordance with the armitice signed in the evening of the 3rd, at Villa Giusti.

The line reaching from Stelvio to the sea was the following: Sluderno, Spondigna and Prato di Venosta in Val Venosta, Male and Cles in the Giudicarie — Passo della Mendola, Rovare della Luna, and Salorno in Val d'Adige — Cembra in Val d'Avisio — Mt. Panarotta in Valsugana — the Tesino

basin — Fiera di Primiero — Chiapuzza — Domegge — Pontebba — Robio — Cormons — Cervignano — Aquileja — Grado.

The Austrian army had been annihilated.

While the last remnants of the enemy were dispersing in disorder, leaving prisoners in our hands by hundreds of thousands, and booty to the value of millions, the Italian army closed its ranks to turn against the only enemy still standing; but this enemy, Germany, because of the precipitancy of events and the unceasing pressure of the armies of the Allies on the west front, was forced also to ask for an armistice.

On November 11th, operations came to a close on all fronts.

One year before, in consequence of certain events of October and November, 1917, the Austrian General Staff had been able to deceive itself into believing that our retirement to the Piave signified the irreparable defeat of the Italian army; and the official Austrian report of October 31st concerning these events closed with these words:

« The display of power that the Central Allies have given to their people in the course of these eight days (October 24-31) has demonstrated that the Central Empires are militarily invincible. All who have seen the field of the retreat to the east of the Tagliamento must have carried away the impression that on this field was lost, not simply an engagement or a battle, but an entire campaign ».

A too hasty judgment by one who failed to understand the temper of the Italian spirit. Our army had been able to fix on the Piave its unbreakable defense; behind the Piave it was assembled again, reorganized, and retempered. It had broken with gallant dash the haughtiness of the enemy, who thought he could overcome its resistance. In ever increasing strength of determination and of faith it stood with nerves and muscles tense in expectation of the great hour and in the certainty of the vindication. One year later, the vindication was complete, absolute, glorious; one year later, the armies of both the Central Empires were obliged to lay down their arms and submit to the conditions of an armistice imposed upon them by the armies of the Allies.

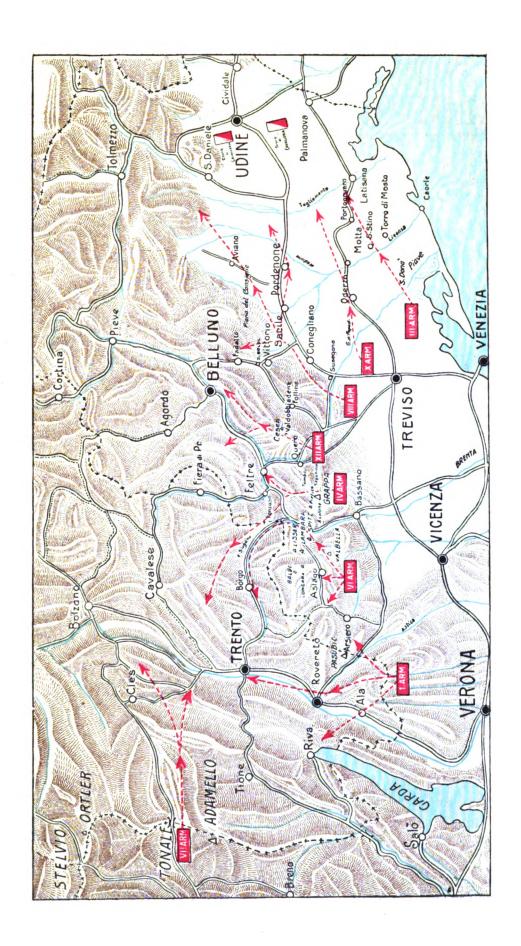
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